DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 575 FL 017 484

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TITLE Phonological Variability in Canadian English.
PUB DATE Dec 87
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (62nd, San Francisco, CA, December 27-30, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Contrastive Linguistics; Diachronic Linguistics; *English; Foreign Countries; *Language Variation; *Phonology; *Regional Dialects; *Sociocultural Patterns
IDENTIFIERS Accents; British Columbia (Vancouver); Canada; *English (Canadian); Ontario (Ottawa)

ABSTRACT

A study compared salient variables of Canadian English from two concurrent sociodialectal surveys, one for Ottawa, Ontario and one for Vancouver, British Columbia. Using the Labovian model of phonological variation in association with sociological parameters and other linguistic variables within each specific area, the analysis investigated four variables. Results indicated certain points of social and regional phonetic divergence and different rates of sound change. It was concluded that whereas pressures of conservatism, such as higher socioeconomic status and age, female sex and regional influence, were retarding change, opposing social or cultural forces were also encouraging shift. However, while differences in the occurrence of the independent variables would appear to reaffirm the importance of geography in establishing local accent, exerting an undeniable influence on the model, the opposition of social factors, singly or in combination, within a regional variety, leads to patterns of innovation and change. Further research is recommended. (MSE)

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ED297575

Phonological Variability in Canadian English

Paper presented at the joint annual meeting of the American Dialect Society and Linguistic Society of America
San Francisco, California, December 1987

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Phonological variability in Canadian English*

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A. Introduction

As a result of converging influences in Canada of varieties of British English and Northern and Midland American, it has been stated (Priestley (1951); von Baeyer (1977); Woods (1979)) that a uniform dialect of Canadian English (CE) encompasses a wider territory than that of any other regional variety, with a General Canadian accent, recognized as urban and educated, spreading westward from Ontario to the Pacific, and affecting even eastern Maritime speech (Avis (1986); Gregg (1984a)). Within this accepted model, however, certain regional and social distinctions appear when phonological variability is considered within a Labovian framework.

A comparison of a few of the salient variables of Canadian English from two recent and concurrent sociodialectal surveys, one in eastern Canada for Ottawa (Woods (1979; 1987)) and the other on the Pacific Coast for Vancouver (Gregg (1984b)), will reveal certain points of phonetic divergence socially and regionally and differential rates of sound change. (The Woods survey of Ottawa English (1979) was the first large-scale urban socio-dialectological work to be completed in Canada, while that of Gregg (1984b) for Greater Vancouver, with 300 informants, including the pilot project, is believed to be the most extensive urban language survey of English to date.)

The importance of these variables may more readily be recognized within the context of an outline of Canadian English (Avis (1973); Bailey (1982); Gregg (1984a)), a

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* This paper was originally presented at the joint annual meeting of the American Dialect Society and Linguistic Society of America, San Francisco, December, 1987.

separate branch of World English, most closely allied with American (Trudgill and Hannah (1985); Funk (1987)). Defined primarily by its lexicon, word formation and vocabulary choice (Avis (1954; 1965); Scargill and Warkentyne (1972); Harris (1975); Gregg (1979); de Wolf (1986)), the phonemic system of CE, lacking the vocalic opposition of *cot/caught* is characterized by ten vowel phonemes (i.e., [i, ɪ, u, ʊ, eɪ, ou, ɛ, ʌ, æ] and [ɒ] ~ [ɑ]) plus schwa, with the three falling diphthongs /aɪ, aʊ, ɔɪ/ common to all branches (Gregg (1957a; 1957b); cf. Kinloch (1983)). The allophonic variation which involves (centring and) raising of the diphthongs /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ to [əi] and [ʌu], respectively, before voiceless consonants (and occasionally [nt]), which is sometimes termed Canadian Raising (v. Chambers (1973); McDavid (1985); Trudgill (1985); cf. Gregg (1973)), constitutes one of the prominent features of this national variety.

In common with World English are the twenty-four consonant phonemes and the alternation of word- or morpheme-final velar [ɪŋ] with alveolar [in], [ɪn], [ən], etc. (cf. Wald and Shopen (1981)). Shared with the Northern American regional accent are features such as the occurrence of preconsonantal and final /r/; the widespread voicing (or flapping) of intervocalic /t/, often the complete loss of /t/ in the environment /ntV/; the use of /æ/ in words such as *dance, class, ask*; the variable pronunciation of initial orthographic *wh*, and the presence or absence of jod before [u] in words such as *student, due, news* (Avis (1973); de Wolf (1983); Gregg (1984a)).

With respect to social and regional distinctions, a Labovian model is concerned with the investigation of phonological variation in association with sociological parameters, such as sex, age, ethnic origin, social class or style, or with other linguistic variables (v. Trudgill (1974)), generally within a specific area, whereas a postulate of dialect geography is the realization of the regional diversity of non-core features of *la parole* (v. Cassidy (1973: 141)). Thus, as Bloomfield ((1933: 49); cited in Moulton (1987: 141)) noted for American English, 'The most stable and striking differences, even in our standard

language, are geographic'. However, when independent variables such as location, gender, generation and socio-economic status are considered together in relation to the use of linguistic variables, which factors are most often statistically significant and which then most relevant?

The linguistic items (in the sense of Hudson (1980)), which are taken from among the same four styles in the two questionnaires, ranging from least to most formal, i.e., Reading Passage, Picture (or Audio-Visual), Word List and Minimal Contrast, are displayed in Table 1. These include the variables (VtV) and (ntV), that is, the phonetic realization of /t/ intervocalically following a stressed syllable, as in *latter*, or following [n] as in *centre*, where voicing (with or without flapping), or even zero articulation in the case of (ntV), would generally apply; the variable (ing), that is, the occurrence of a velar rather than alveolar nasal in word-, morpheme- or suffix-final ending, as in *morning*, *something*, *going*; the variables (ʌu) and (əi), that is, the allophonic variation of the diphthongs /aʊ/ and /aɪ/ before voiceless consonants, as in *house* (versus *houses*) and *knife* (versus *knives*) (Chambers (1973)), and the variables (ju), (hw) and (ɒ), respectively, the appearance of jod before [u] after initial [(s)t, d, n]; voiced [w] or voiceless [hw], as in *what*, *where*, and the occurrence phonetically of the slightly rounded back vowel [ɒ] in *cot*, *caught* versus the unrounded, unmarked [ɑ].

In the case of (VtV), the intervocalic voicing of [t], considered almost universal in the United States, appears to be an optional feature of Canadian English (Avis (1956; 1978); Woods (1979); Gregg (1984b)), while the loss of [t] following /n/ is more typical of rapid speech, rather than a constant case of deletion. The initial voiceless /w/, i.e., [hw], variable also in the eastern U.S. (McDavid and McDavid (1952)), results from the influence of the Scottish and Scotch-Irish (Gregg (personal communication)), whereas the pronunciation of [ju] and the slightly rounded back vowel [ɒ] is derivable from the prestigious British accent.

Table 1. Salient linguistic variables in Canadian English.

Variable	Tested Value	No. Items	Examples	Variants
(VtV)	[t]	41	tomato, daughter	[d]
(ntV)	[t]	10	plenty, centre	[d, ø]
(ing)	[ɪŋ]	18	morning, going	[ɪn], [ɪn~ən]
(ʌu)	[ʌu]	7	house, shouted	[aω]
(əɪ)	[əɪ]	7	tonight, writer	[aɪ]
(ju)	[ju]	14	new, Tuesday	[u]
(hw)	[hw]	11	what, when	[w]
(ɒ)	[ɒ]	9	caught, cot, Ottawa	[ɑ]

Source: Woods (1979); Gregg (1984b) data bases. Data Library, University of British Columbia.

B. Methodology

With respect to methodology, identical lexical items containing the phonological variables were selected from occurrences in the same four styles in the two surveys, with the number of achievable tokens indicated in Table 1. With the data bases combined for purposes of analysis, the 340 informants involved (100 Ottawa; 240 Vancouver) were arranged into sixteen cells, consisting of the two locations; two sexes (Male, 167; Female, 173), two ages: a Young (155 respondents, aged under forty), and an Old (185 forty and over; i.e., born in, or prior to, the year 1939); and two socio-economic status groups, a High (composed of 180 informants, from the two surveys) and a Low (of 160 informants), derived by dividing the two comparable socio-economic indices at midpoint (the division, in terms of education, is high school graduation versus further university training; v. Woods (1979; 1987); Gregg (1984b); de Wolf (1988)). Proportional response data in each style were collected from every individual offering a reply and the results then tabulated. (I am indebted to Dr. A.J. Petkau, Department of Statistics, University

of British Columbia, for advice regarding the analyses and to Le Thinh, Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia, for assistance with the data.) Analysis of variance from the SAS programme package (Statistical Analysis System; v. Helwig (1985)) was utilized for the weighted average across style to test the underlying value, or the typical or conservative variant of each phonological variable (Table 1). In addition, since it was hypothesized that relationships in use among the phonological values might occur, further tests, following a particular model of multiple regression, were conducted on the separate data bases. For these tests, only data from individuals offering a response to each stimulus in every style were included.

To present an overview in terms of descriptive statistics, Table 2 shows, in percentage form, the means for the weighted average across style from the combined data bases for the tested values of each separate phonological variable. The number of

Table 2. Mean percent of the tested response values for selected linguistic variables in Canadian English: Ottawa and Vancouver.

Variable	Mean Percent	Tested Value	N
(VtV)	45	[t]	336
(ntV)	75	[t]	335
(ing)	73	[ɪŋ]	336
(ʌu)	86	[ʌu]	336
(əɪ)	86	[əɪ]	333
(ju)	55	[ju]	333
(hw)	25	[hw]	332
(ɒ)	62	[ɒ]	335

informants differs for each variable owing, in this case, to the individual analysis.

Overall, for both cities, it can be seen from Table 2 that the Canadian diphthongs, i.e., [ʌu] and [əɪ] in a raising environment, followed by the consonantal values [ntV] and [ɪŋ], were produced most frequently in the informants' responses, with the slightly rounded vowel of *pot* and *cot* next. The voiceless [hw] occurred infrequently, indicating

recessiveness, while intervocalic [t], at 45%, and [ju], just over 50%, hovered about the halfway mark. In view of the thorough sampling of the two cities at a similar time, perhaps these averaged figures could be considered as reasonably typical of urban Canadian speech values over a wide area for the period involved.

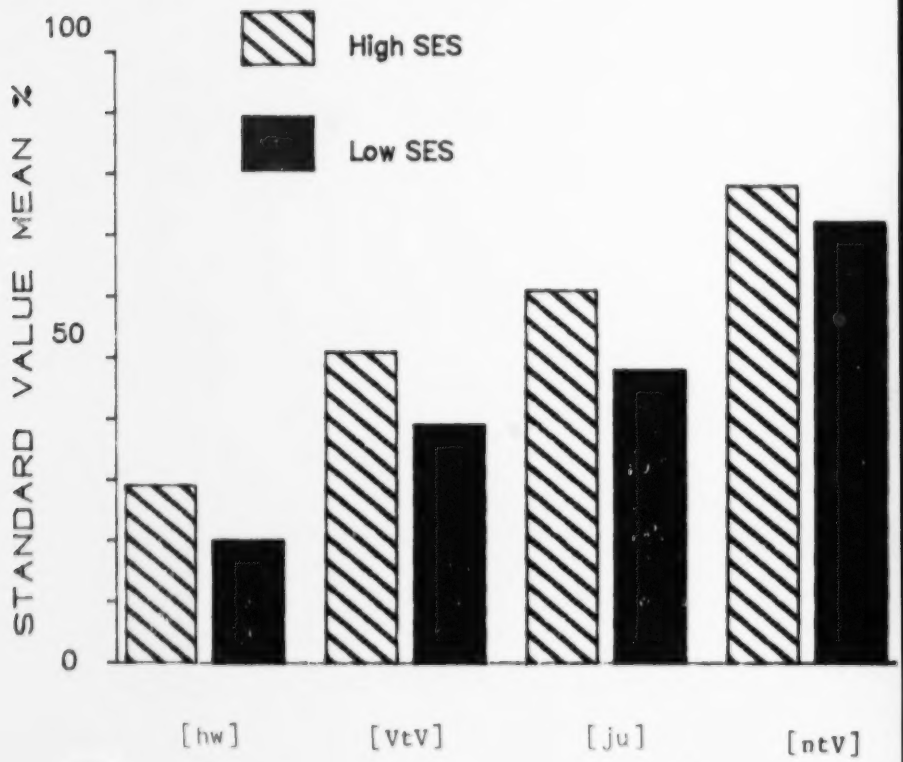
C. Discussion of the results.

The results of the analyses pertaining to the significance of the selected factors are displayed in Figures 1 to 4. (I am indebted to Dr. J.H. Esling, Department of Linguistics, University of Victoria, for suggestions regarding the figures; the bar charts were kindly provided by Mary Sanseverino, Micro-Computing Laboratory, Cornett Building.) Figure 1, for example, indicates the phonological groups in which socio-economic status served as an important factor. Maintaining a conservative stance, those of high status preserved the traditional value significantly more often than those of low for the variables (VtV), (ntV), (ju) and (hw) (and in interaction only for (ing) and (əɪ)). While the least difference in use between levels occurred with the variable (ntV), wider margins of approximately 10% were present in the case of the other variables. However, as an interaction effect, status-based distinctions for (ing) occurred regionally only in Ottawa. Noteworthy, also, is the fact that the largest differences in response means between those of high and low status were present in the variables (VtV) and (ju), and, among the old, in the variable (hw).

Figure 2 illustrates the importance of gender for certain of the variables. Across the board, significant differences between men and women were found for the tested values of the consonantal variables (VtV), (ntV) and (ing) and the vocalic variables (ju) and (ʌu) (and also (əɪ), in interaction only). In all cases but one, that of the Canadian diphthong (ʌu), women produced the traditional or standard variant more often than men, with wide distinctions in use shown for the variables (ntV) in particular, (VtV) and (ju). In these variables, status-based distinctions also occurred, with a much higher use of [ju] among

FIGURE 1

Socio-economic Status.
Standard Value Mean % for 4 Phonological Variables (Weighted Average across Style): Status Differences among High and Low



women of high status. In the case of both [VtV] and [ntV], wide class differences in use were present between men in Vancouver and between women in Ottawa. Differences in means were much less for the standard variants of variables such as (ing) and (ʌu). Interestingly, and in accord with earlier findings with respect to sex distinctions in speech (v. Trudgill (1983)), variables for which women displayed significantly higher response means coincided in general with those in use also by the higher status group; however, the conservative usage of [ntV] by women was especially marked when compared with higher status use. On the other hand, the Canadian value for the variable (ʌu), in which the score for men surpassed that of women, showed no influence of social class.

In Figure 3, the variables in which significant differences in response means on the basis of generation were found are presented. Indicating a change in apparent time and also, though in varying degree, the conservative properties of age, wide differences in value use were found for the variables (VtV) and the recessive (hw), with less difference in means shown for the standard values of (ing), (ju) and the two Canadian diphthongs (ʌu) and (əɪ). For example, in Ottawa, women over forty strongly maintained the use of [əɪ], compared with the young of both sexes, while, in the case of (ing), age-based differences were also noted in Vancouver among men, among women in Ottawa, and between high and low status groups in both locations.

With percentages under 50% for the traditional value of (VtV), it is clear that voicing is becoming the norm for the young since a national convergence in mean score was shown. Such change, barring a minor rule reversal, or the further and stronger influence of British English (or even Southern American (v. Pitts (1986)), seems imminent also for the variable (ju) while, from these figures, (hw) is in danger of losing its variable status, a change forecast some thirty years ago for Vancouver by Gregg (1957b) and noted in Ontario by Avis (1956).

FIGURE 2

Standard Value Mean % for 5 Phonological Variables (Weighted Average across Style): Sex Differences in Men and Women

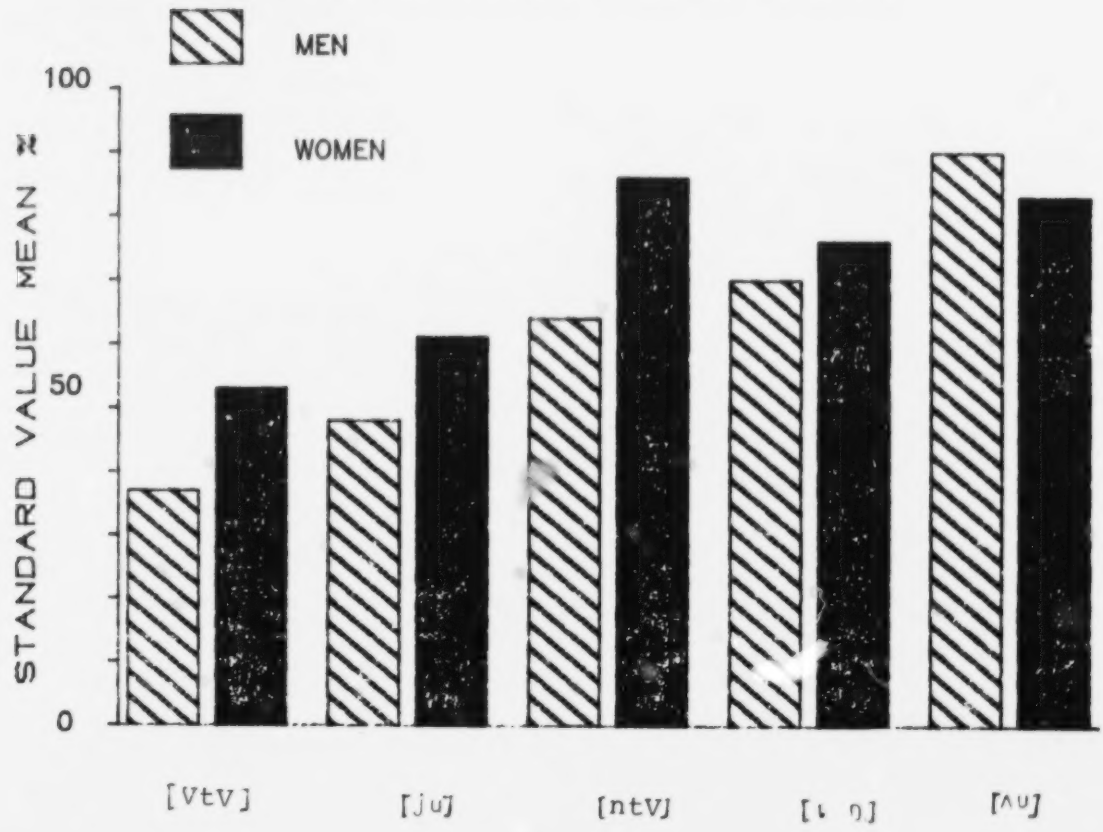
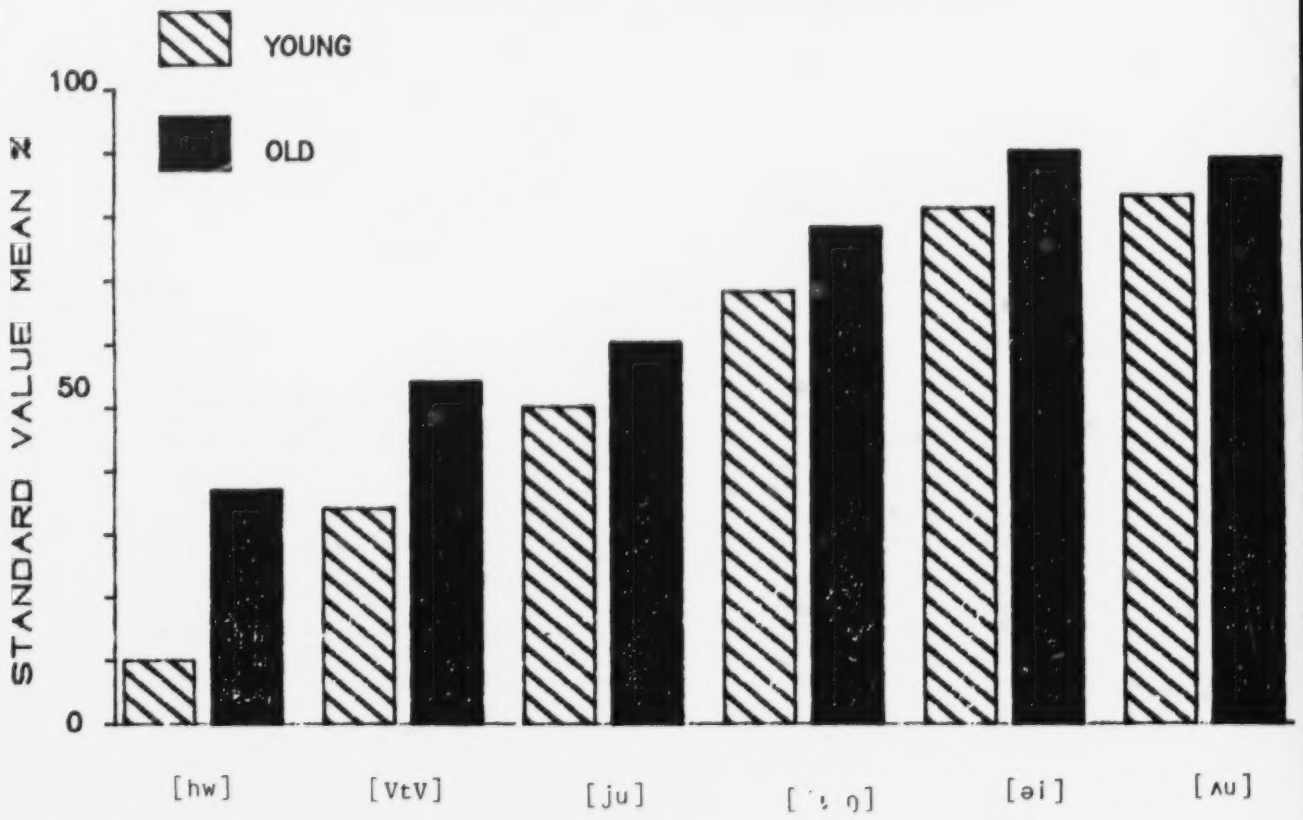


FIGURE 3

Standard Value Mean % for 6 Phonological Variables (Weighted Average across Style): Age Differences in the Young and Old



Finally, Figure 4 indicates the variables in which location or region was found to be important in the informants' response to the use of the linguistic variant investigated. As can be noted from a comparison with earlier tables, in a survey of factors, location dominated. In fact, for seven of the eight variables (or 88%), area was significant. Only in the case of the recessive variable (hw) was region unimportant, and even here non-significant differences in means occurred. Such findings reaffirm then the traditional notions of the importance of geography with respect to regional accent (v. Macaulay (1973)).

Very wide regional differences existed in the case of the variable diphthongs (ʌu) and (əɪ), and the vocalic variable (ɒ). Regional conservatism thus was demonstrated in a slight crossover, with greater use of the Canadian diphthongs in Vancouver, and of the slightly rounded back vowel [ɒ] in Ottawa. Here, parenthetically, it should be noted (Woods (1979)) that a much greater incidence of lowering of the diphthongs in the environment of intervocalic voicing, that is, in which [t] becomes [d], was found in Ottawa (v. Chambers (1973) for rule interaction). The greatest regional distinction, however, was reserved for the variable (ing), with a locational difference of close to 30% (and a mean of 81% in Vancouver). (When the two more formal values of (ing), i.e., [ɪŋ] and [ɪn]([ɪ] here represents a short cardinal vowel #1), were merged for a comparison, even wider differences arose.) These areal changes, for which widespread variation was noted in other branches of World English, nonetheless accord with the observances of Wells (1982: 262-263) who suggested geographically differing points of stratification for variants of (ing).

The importance of the various factors and their influence on the individual phonological variables selected is summarized in Table 3 where percentage figures, by level, for the significant factors are displayed.

FIGURE 4

Standard Value Mean % for 7 Phonological Variables (Weighted Average across Style): Regional Differences in Ottawa and Vancouver

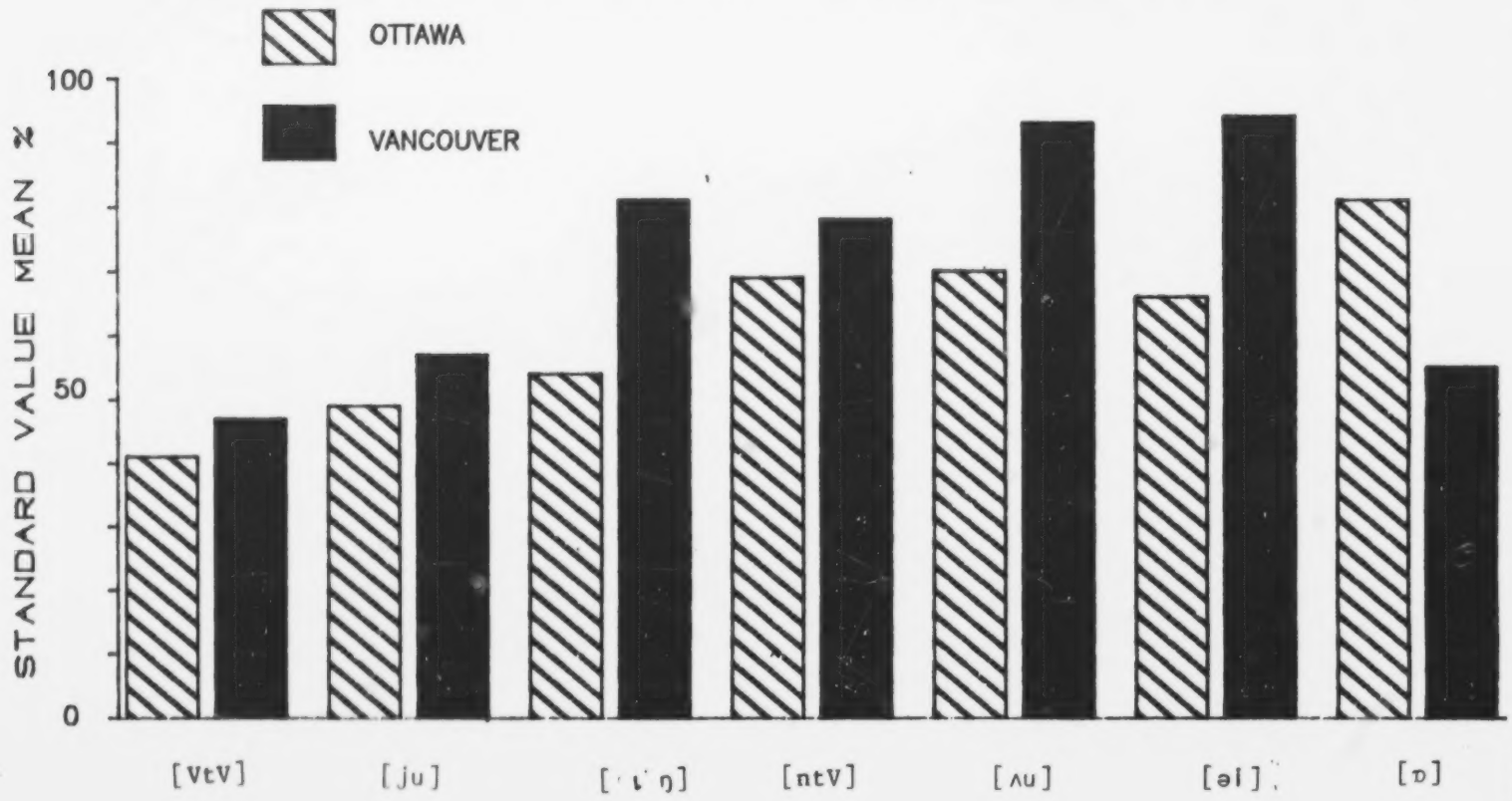


Table 3. Summary of significant factors for tested values of salient variables in Canadian English: mean response percent for the weighted average across style.

	SES		Sex		Age		Location	
Variable	High	Low	Male	Female	Young	Old	Ottawa	Vancouver
(VtV)	51	39	37	53	34	54	41	47
(ju)	61	48	48	61	50	60	49	57
(ing)	interaction only		70	76	68	78	54	81
(ʌu)	*	*	90	83	83	89	70	93
(ntV)	78	72	64	86	*	*	67	78
(əɪ)	interaction only		interaction only		81	90	66	94
(hw)	29	20	*	*	10	37	*	*
(ɒ)	*	*	*	*	*	*	81	55

* not significant

In examining figures for the tested values of the variables (VtV) and (ju), the separately conservative effects of high status, female sex, age, and to a lesser degree, western region, were shown whereas, reflected in declining adherence to traditional values, the young, men, those of low status and Ottawans departed from the traditional norm. While the stylistic variation evidenced in (VtV) usage illustrated a certain awareness of the shift, little such conscious (or subconscious) knowledge, on the basis of style, was exhibited in the case of (ju). With higher means generally for the standard value than for that of (VtV), this variable appeared to be more generationally stable as well; in this case, the ongoing processes of change were somewhat slower, impeded perhaps by prestige considerations and the latent influence of the British model. To a varying extent, these same influences of sex, age, status and location were shown also for values of the generationally stable variable (ntV), the regionally disparate variable (ing), the diphthong (əɪ) and the recessive (hw). On the other hand, the traditional value

for Canadian diphthong (ʌu), also stronger in the Pacific Coast city, was nevertheless more used by men (v. Woods (1979)). However, reversing the trend for higher means for traditional variants in the Greater Vancouver area, the typical Canadian value for the variable (ɒ), i.e., [ɒ], showed much greater strength in the Ottawa region.

With respect to the hypothesis of possible relationships in use among the variables (v. Gregg (1957a)), the significant results, from a particular model, of the separate multiple regressions for each city indicated some differences in predictive values for the eight phonological variants. In the Ottawa data, for example, there were no predictive values for [ɒ]. The combinations of variants which predict the phonological values tested are

Table 4. Predictive values for selected variants of phonological variables in Canadian English: Ottawa and Vancouver (N = 325).*

	Predictors	
Predicted Value	**Ottawa (N = 87)**	**Vancouver (N = 238)**
[VtV]	[ntV, əi, ju, hw]*	[ntV, ju, hw, ɒ]
[ntV]	[VtV, ʌu, əi, ju]	[VtV, hw]
[ɪŋ]	[hw]*	[VtV]
[ʌu]	[ntV, əi, ju]	[əi, ɒ]
[əi]	[VtV, ʌu]	[ʌu]
[ju]	[VtV, ntV, ʌu]	[VtV]
[hw]*	[VtV, ɪŋ]	[VtV, ntV, ju]
[ɒ]	-	[VtV]

* Only informants who offered a response to each token in every style for all variables were included in this analysis. Owing to low response values and fewer informants in the Ottawa survey, predictive values from the multiple regression which concern [hw] are to be considered with caution.

summarized individually for Ottawa and Vancouver in Table 4.

In Ottawa, for the items investigated, the variant [t] in the variable (VtV) and the Canadian diphthong [ʌu] were both predicted by the combined use of the [t] in [ntV], as in *centre*, and [əi] and [ju], as in *tonight* and *new*, respectively, whereas [ntV] usage in

these data was suggested jointly by [VtV], as in *tomato*, [ʌu], as in *house*, [əɪ], as in *writer*, and [ju], as in *Tuesday*. On the other hand, the vocalic variable [ju] was predicted by [VtV], [ntV] and [ʌu], and [əɪ] by a subset of this, i.e., [VtV] and [ʌu]. Through uncertain results, the recessive value [hw] was predicted with caution by [VtV] and [ɪŋ], and [ɪŋ] by [hw].

In the case of the Vancouver data, not only did the number of predictors appear to be fewer, but the predictors were also not identical (Table 4). Thus, [ntV], [ju], [hw] and [ɒ] all predicted the use of [VtV], and [VtV] and [hw] the use of [ntV]. The value [VtV] alone, however, suggested the use of [ɪŋ], [ju] and [ɒ], whereas [əɪ] and [ɒ] predicted [ʌu]; and [ʌu] its counterpart diphthong [əɪ]. The use of recessive [hw] was suggested by [VtV], [ntV] and [ju]; [ɪŋ] did not serve as a predictor for any other value.

In both sets of data, [ʌu] and [əɪ], in combination with other variants, served as predictors for each other, as did also [VtV] and [ntV], [VtV] and [ju], and with caution in the case of Ottawa, [VtV] and [hw] (Table 4). Thus, [VtV], which was closely correlated in use with [ntV], served as the most common predictor of other values in the two cities while, in Ottawa, the vocalic variables [ʌu], [əɪ] and [ju] occurred frequently as well. These interlocking local relationships of phonological values indicate, despite the underlying unity of the regional variety, somewhat differing patterns of usage nationally, suggesting a need for further exploration into the relatedness of accent.

In summary then, whereas pressures of conservatism, such as higher socio-economic status and age, female sex and regional influence, were retarding change, noticeably in the case of the variables (VtV) and (ju), opposing social or cultural forces were also encouraging shift. However, while differences in the occurrence of the independent variables would appear to reaffirm the importance of geography in establishing local accent, exerting an undeniable influence on the model, it would appear that the

opposition of social factors, singly or in combination, within a regional variety, leads to patterns of innovation and change. Further research is thus needed.

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